

A MILLION DOLLAR FREIGHT TRAIN

*THE STORY OF A YOUNG ENGINEER
ON HIS FIRST RUN*

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

IT was the second month of the strike, and not a pound of freight had been removed. Things did look smoky on the West End. The General Superintendent happened to be with us when the news came. "You can't handle it, boys," said he nervously. "What you'd better do is to turn it over to the Columbian Pacific."

Our contracting freight agent on the Coast at that time was a fellow so erratic that he was nicknamed "Crazy-horse." Right in the midst of the strike Crazy-horse wired that he had secured a big shipment

for New York. We were paralyzed. We had no engineers, no firemen, and no motive power to speak of. The strikers were pounding our men, wrecking our trains, and giving us the worst of it generally; that is, when we couldn't give it to them. Why the fellow displayed his activity at that particular juncture still remains a mystery. Perhaps he had a grudge against the road; if so, he took an artful revenge. Everybody on the system with ordinary railroad sense knew that our struggle was to keep clean of freight business until we got rid of our strike. Anything valuable or perishable was especially unwelcome. But the stuff was docked, and loaded, and consigned in our care before we knew it. After that, a refusal to carry it would be like hoisting the white flag; and that is something which never yet flew over the West End.

"Turn it over to the Columbian," said the General Superintendent; but the General Superintendent was not looked up to on our division. He hadn't enough sand. Our head was a fighter, and he gave tone to every man under him. "No," he thundered, bring-

ing down his fist. "Not in a thousand years. We'll move it ourselves. Wire Montgomery [the General Manager] that we will take care of it. And wire him to fire Crazy-horse—and to do it right off." And before the silk was turned over to us Crazy-horse was looking for another job. It is the only case on record where a freight hustler was discharged for getting business.

There were twelve carloads; it was insured for \$85,000 a car; you can figure how far the title is wrong, but you never can estimate the worry the stuff gave us. It looked as big as twelve million dollars' worth. In fact, one scrub car-tink, with the glory of the West End at heart, had a fight over the amount with a skeptical hostler. He maintained that the actual money value was a hundred and twenty millions; but I give you the figures just as they went over the wire, and they are right.

What bothered us most was that the strikers had the tip almost as soon as we had it. Having friends on every road in the country, they knew as much about our business as we ourselves. The minute it was

announced that we should move the silk, they were after us. It was a defiance; a last one. If we could move freight—for we were already moving passengers after a fashion—the strike might be well accounted beaten.

Stewart, the leader of the local contingent, together with his followers, got after me at once. "You don't show much sense, Reed," said he. "You fellows here are breaking your necks to get things moving, and when this strike's over, if our boys ask for your discharge, they'll get it. This road can't run without our engineers. We're going to beat you. If you dare try to move this silk, we'll have your scalp when it's over. You'll never get your silk to Zanesville, I'll promise you that. And if you ditch it and make a million-dollar loss, you'll get let out anyway, my buck."

"I'm here to obey orders, Stewart," said I. What was the use of more? I felt uncomfortable; but we had determined to move the silk; there was no more to be said.

When I went over to the round-house and told Neighbor the decision, he said never a

word; but he looked a great deal. Neighbor's task was to supply the motive power. All that we had, uncrippled, was in the passenger service, because passengers should be taken care of first of all. In order to win a strike, you must have public opinion on your side.

"Nevertheless, Neighbor," said I, after we had talked a while, "we must move the silk also."

Neighbor studied; then he roared at his foreman. "Send Bartholomew Mullen here." He spoke with a decision that made me think the business was done. I had never happened, it is true, to hear of Bartholomew Mullen in the department of motive power; but the impression the name gave me was of a monstrous fellow, big as Neighbor, or old man Sankey, or Dad Hamilton. "I'll put Bartholomew ahead of it," said Neighbor tightly.

I saw a boy walk into the office. "Mr. Garten said you wanted me sir," said he, addressing the Master Mechanic.

"I do, Bartholomew," responded Neighbor.

The figure in my mind's eye shrunk in a twinkling. Then it occurred to me that it must be this boy's father who was wanted.

"You have been begging for a chance to take out an engine, Bartholomew," began Neighbor coldly; and I knew it was on.

"Yes, sir."

"You want to get killed, Bartholomew."

Bartholomew smiled as if the idea was not altogether displeasing.

"How would you like to go pilot to-morrow for McCurdy? You to take the 44 and run as first Seventy-eight. McCurdy will run as second Seventy-eight."

"I know I could run an engine all right," ventured Bartholomew, as if Neighbor were the only one taking the chances in giving him an engine. "I know the track from here to Zanesville. I helped McNeff fire one week."

"Then go home, and go to bed; and be over here at six o'clock to-morrow morning. And sleep sound, for it may be your last chance."

It was plain that the Master Mechanic hated to do it; it was simply sheer neces-

sity. "He's a wiper," mused Neighbor as Bartholomew walked springily away. "I took him in here sweeping two years ago. He ought to be firing now, but the union held him back; that's why he don't like them. He knows more about an engine now than half the lodge. They'd better have let him in," said the Master Mechanic grimly. "He may be the means of breaking their backs yet. If I give him an engine and he runs it, I'll never take him off, union or no union, strike or no strike."

"How old is that boy," I asked.

"Eighteen; and never a kith or a kin that I know of. Bartholomew Mullen," mused Neighbor, as the slight figure moved across the flat, "big name—small boy. Well, Bartholomew, you'll know something more by to-morrow night about running an engine, or a whole lot less: that's as it happens. If he gets killed, it's your fault, Reed."

He meant that I was calling on him for men when he couldn't supply them.

"I heard once," he went on, "about a fellow named Bartholomew being mixed up in a massacre. But I take it he must have

been an older man than our Bartholomew—nor his other name wasn't Mullen, neither. I disremember just what it was ; but it wasn't Mullen."

" Well, don't say I want to get the boy killed, Neighbor," I protested. " I've got plenty to answer for. I'm here to run trains —when there are any to run ; that's murder enough for me. You needn't send Bartholomew out on my account."

" Give him a slow schedule, and I'll give him orders to jump early ; that's all we can do. If the strikers don't ditch him, he'll get through somehow."

It stuck in my crop—the idea of putting that boy on a pilot engine to take all the dangers ahead of that particular train ; but I had a good deal else to think of besides. From the minute the silk got into the McCloud yards, we posted double guards around. About twelve o'clock that night we held a council of war, which ended in our running the train into the out freight-house. The result was that by morning we had a new train made up. It consisted of fourteen refrigerator cars loaded with oranges which

had come in mysteriously the night before. It was announced that the silk would be held for the present and the oranges rushed through at once. Bright and early the refrigerator train was run down to the ice-houses, and twenty men were put to work icing the oranges. At seven o'clock, McCurdy pulled in the local passenger with engine 105. Our plan was to cancel the local and run him right out with the oranges. When he got in, he reported that the 105 had sprung a tire; this threw us out entirely. There was a hurried conference in the round-house.

"What can you do?" asked the Superintendent in desperation.

"There's only one thing I can do. Put Bartholomew Mullen on it with the 44, and put McCurdy to bed for Number Two to-night," responded Neighbor.

We were running first in first out; but we took care always to have somebody for One and Two who at least knew an injector from an air-pump.

It was eight o'clock. I looked into the locomotive stalls. The first—the only—man

in sight was Bartholomew Mullen. He was very busy polishing the 44. He had good steam on her, and the old tub was wheezing away as if she had the asthma. The 44 was old; she was homely; she was rickety; but Bartholomew Mullen wiped her battered nose as deferentially as if she had been a spick-span, spider-driver, tail-truck mail-racer. She wasn't much—the 44. But in those days Bartholomew wasn't much: and the 44 was Bartholomew's.

"How is she steaming, Bartholomew?" I sang out; he was right in the middle of her. Looking up, he fingered his waste modestly and blushed through a dab of crude petroleum over his eye. "Hundred and thirty pounds, sir. She's a terrible free steamer, the old 44. I'm all ready to run her out."

"Who's marked up to fire for you, Bartholomew?"

Bartholomew Mullen looked at me fraternally. "Neighbor couldn't give me anybody but a wiper, sir," said Bartholomew, in a sort of a wouldn't-that-kill-you tone.

The unconscious arrogance of the boy

quite knocked me: so soon had honors changed his point of view. Last night a despised wiper; at daybreak, an engineer; and his nose in the air at the idea of taking on a wiper for fireman. And all so innocent.

“Would you object, Bartholomew,” I suggested gently, “to a train-master for fireman?”

“I don’t—think so, sir.”

“Thank you; because I am going down to Zanesville this morning myself, and I thought I’d ride with you. Is it all right?”

“Oh, yes, sir—if Neighbor doesn’t care.”

I smiled: he didn’t know whom Neighbor took orders from; but he thought, evidently, not from me.

“Then run her down to the oranges, Bartholomew, and couple on, and we’ll order ourselves out. See?”

The 44 looked like a baby-carriage when we got her in front of the refrigerators. However, after the necessary preliminaries, we gave a very sporty toot, and pulled out. In a few minutes we were sailing down the valley.

For fifty miles we bobbed along with our

cargo of iced silk as easy as old shoes; for I need hardly explain that we had packed the silk into the refrigerators to confuse the strikers. The great risk was that they would try to ditch us.

I was watching the track as a mouse would a cat, looking every minute for trouble. We cleared the gumbo cut west of the Beaver at a pretty good clip, in order to make the grade on the other side. The bridge there is hidden in summer by a grove of blackberries. I had just pulled open to cool her a bit when I noticed how high the back-water was on each side of the track. Suddenly I felt the fill going soft under the drivers; felt the 44 wobble and slew. Bartholomew shut off hard, and threw the air as I sprang to the window. The peaceful little creek ahead looked as angry as the Platte in April water, and the bottoms were a lake.

Somewhere up the valley there had been a cloudburst, for overhead the sun was bright. The Beaver was roaring over its banks, and the bridge was out. Bartholomew screamed for brakes; it looked as if we were against it—and hard. A soft track to

stop on; a torrent of storm-water ahead, and ten hundred thousand dollars' worth of silk behind, not to mention equipment.

I yelled at Bartholomew, and motioned for him to jump; my conscience is clear on that point. The 44 was stumbling along, trying like a drunken man to hang to the rotten track.

“Bartholomew!” I yelled; but he was head out and looking back at his train while he jerked frantically at the air-lever. I understood: the air wouldn’t work; it never will on those old tubs when you need it. The sweat pushed out on me. I was thinking of how much the silk would bring us after the bath in the Beaver. Bartholomew stuck to his levers like a man in a signal-tower, but every second brought us closer to open water. Watching him intent only on saving his first train—heedless of his life—I was actually ashamed to jump. While I hesitated he somehow got the brakes to set; the old 44 bucked like a bronco.

It wasn’t too soon. She checked her train nobly at the last, but I saw nothing could keep her from the drink. I gave Bartholo-

mew a terrific slap, and again I yelled; then turning to the gangway, I dropped into the soft mud on my side: the 44 hung low, and it was easy lighting.

Bartholomew sprang from his seat a second later; but his blouse caught in the teeth of the quadrant. He stooped quick as thought, and peeled the thing over his head. Then he was caught fast by the wristbands, and the ponies of the 44 tipped over the broken abutment. Pull as he would he couldn't get free. The pilot dipped into the torrent slowly. But losing her balance, the 44 kicked her heels into the air like lightning, and shot with a frightened wheeze plump into the creek, dragging her engineer with her.

The head car stopped on the brink. Running across the track, I looked for Bartholomew. He wasn't there; I knew he must have gone down with his engine. Throwing off my gloves, I dived, just as I stood, close to the tender, which hung half submerged. I am a good bit of a fish under water, but no self-respecting fish would be caught in that yellow mud. I realized, too, the instant I

struck the water, that I should have dived on the upstream side. The current took me away whirling; when I came up for air, I was fifty feet below the pier. I scrambled out, feeling it was all up with Bartholomew; but to my amazement, as I shook my eyes open the train crew were running forward, and there stood Bartholomew on the track above me, looking at the refrigerators. When I got to him, he explained how he was dragged under and had to tear the sleeves out of his blouse under water to get free.

The surprise is how little fuss men make about such things when they are busy. It took only five minutes for the conductor to hunt up a coil of wire and a sounder for me, and by the time he got forward with it, Bartholomew was half-way up a telegraph pole to help me cut in on a live wire. Fast as I could, I rigged a pony, and began calling the McCloud despatcher. It was rocky sending, but after no end of pounding, I got him and gave orders for the wrecking gang, and for one more of Neighbor's rapidly decreasing supply of locomotives.

Bartholomew, sitting on a strip of fence

which still rose above the water, looked forlorn. To lose in the Beaver the first engine he ever handled was tough, and he was evidently speculating on his chances of ever getting another. If there weren't tears in his eyes, there was storm-water certainly. But after the relief engine had pulled what was left of us back six miles to a siding, I made it my first business to explain to Neighbor, who was nearly beside himself, that Bartholomew not only was not at fault, but that by his nerve he had actually saved the train.

"I'll tell you, Neighbor," I suggested, when we got straightened around. "Give us the 109 to go ahead as pilot, and run her around the river division with Foley and the 216."

"What'll you do with Number Six?" growled Neighbor. Six was the local passenger west.

"Annul it west of McCloud," said I instantly. "We've got this silk on our hands now, and I'd move it if it tied up every passenger train on the division. If we can get the stuff through, it will practically beat the strike. If we fail, it will beat the company."

By the time we had backed to Newhall Junction, Neighbor had made up his mind my way. Mullen and I climbed into the 109. and Foley, with the 216, and none too good a grace, coupled on to the silk, and flying red signals, we started again for Zanesville over the river division.

Foley was always full of mischief. He had a better engine than ours, and he took great satisfaction the rest of the afternoon in crowding us. Every mile of the way he was on our heels. I was throwing the coal, and have reason to remember. It was after dark when we reached the Beverly Hill, and we took it at a lively pace. The strikers were not on our minds then; it was Foley who bothered.

When the long parallel steel lines of the upper yards spread before us, flashing under the arc lights, we were away above yard speed. Running a locomotive into one of those big yards is like shooting a rapid in a canoe. There is a bewildering maze of tracks, lighted by red and green lamps, which must be watched the closest to keep out of trouble. The hazards are multiplied

the minute you pass the throat, and a yard wreck is a dreadful tangle; it makes everybody from road-master to flagman furious, and not even Bartholomew wanted to face an inquiry on a yard wreck. On the other hand, he couldn't afford to be caught by Foley, who was chasing him out of pure caprice.

I saw the boy holding the throttle at a half and fingering the air anxiously as we jumped over the frogs; but the roughest riding on track so far beats the ties as a cushion, that when the 109 suddenly stuck her paws through an open switch we bounced against the roof of the cab like foot-balls. I grabbed a brace with one hand, and with the other reached instinctively across to Bartholomew's side to seize the throttle. But as I tried to shut him off, he jerked it wide open in spite of me, and turned with lightning in his eye. "No!" he cried, and his voice rang hard. The 109 took the tremendous shove at her back, and leaped like a frightened horse. Away we went across the yard, through the cinders, and over the ties; my teeth have never been the same since.

I don't belong on an engine, anyway, and since then I have kept off. At the moment, I was convinced that the strain had been too much, that Bartholomew was stark crazy. He sat clinging like a lobster to his levers and bouncing clear to the roof.

But his strategy was dawning on me; in fact, he was pounding it into me. Even the shock and scare of leaving the track and tearing up the yard had not driven from Bartholomew's noddle the most important feature of our situation, which was, above everything, to *keep out of the way of the silk train.*

I felt every moment more mortified at my attempt to shut him off. I had done the trick of the woman who grabs the reins. It was even better to tear up the yard than to stop for Foley to smash into and scatter the silk over the coal chutes. Bartholomew's decision was one of the traits which make the runner: instant perception coupled to instant resolve. The ordinary dub thinks what he should have done to avoid disaster after it is all over; Bartholomew thought before.

On we bumped, across frogs, through switches, over splits, and into target rods, when—and this is the miracle of it all—the 109 got her forefeet on a split switch, made a contact, and after a slew or two, like a bogged horse, she swung up sweet on the rails again, tender and all. Bartholomew shut off with an under cut that brought us up stuttering, and nailed her feet with the air right where she stood. We had left the track and ploughed a hundred feet across the yards and jumped on to another track. It is the only time I ever heard of its happening anywhere, but I was on the engine with Bartholomew Mullen when it was done.

Foley choked his train the instant he saw our hind lights bobbing. We climbed down, and ran back. He had stopped just where we should have stood if I had shut off.

Bartholomew ran to the switch to examine it. The contact light (green) still burned like a false beacon; and lucky it did, for it showed that the switch had been tampered with and exonerated Bartholomew Mullen completely. The attempt of the strikers to spill the silk in the yards had only made the

reputation of a new engineer. Thirty minutes later, the million-dollar train was turned over to the East End to wrestle with, and we breathed, all of us, a good bit easier.

Bartholomew Mullen, now a passenger runner who ranks with Kennedy and Jack Moore and Foley and George Sinclair himself, got a personal letter from the General Manager complimenting him on his pretty wit; and he was good enough to say nothing whatever about mine.

We registered that night and went to supper together: Foley, Jackson, Bartholomew, and I. Afterwards we dropped into the despatcher's office. Something was coming from McCloud, but the operator to save his life couldn't catch it. I listened a minute; it was Neighbor. Now, Neighbor isn't great on despatching trains. He can make himself understood over the poles, but his sending is like a boy's sawing wood—sort of uneven. However, though I am not much on running yards, I claim to be able to take the wildest ball that was ever thrown along the wire, and the chair was tendered me at once to catch Neighbor's extraordinary passes at the

McCloud key. They came something like this:

“To Opr. Tell Massacree”—that was the word that stuck them all, and I could perceive that Neighbor was talking emphatically. He had apparently forgotten Bartholomew's last name, and was trying to connect with the one he had “disremembered” the night before. “Tell Massacree,” repeated Neighbor, “that he is al-l-l right, Tell hi-m I give him double mileage for to-day all the way through. And to-morrow he gets the 109 to keep.—NEIGH-B-OR.